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ON PAGE **A-13**

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Intelligence Background No Defect

The nomination of Thomas Pauken to be director of the ACTION agency has raised deep issues wholly unconnected with either Mr. Pauken's competence or ACTION's mission. To date, no one has seriously questioned Mr. Pauken's abilities or his competence to head ACTION; no one has seriously questioned the future direction of ACTION and its program. What has been questioned is whether Mr. Pauken's brief involvement in military intelligence while serving in Vietnam in the 1960s renders him unfit to serve as ACTION director.

That Mr. Pauken's intelligence service should be brought forward as a defect in his record, rather than as an advantage, speaks volumes about the regard with which intelligence work is held in some quarters. There are still those in this country who, while professing the general importance of intelligence capabilities, spare no opportunity to denigrate those who engage in this work.

Goal of Intelligence

A first-rate intelligence capability would be important to the United States even if this were not a dangerous world. The goal of intelligence, after all, is intelligent decisions, and all branches and all agencies of government require current, reliable information in order to perform well. Legislators gather "intelligence" in the course of making decisions on major issues of legislative importance. Although intelligence work has certainly unique characteristics, its function is to provide the basis for informed decisions and in this regard is not different in nature than research and analysis which is necessary for any decision in the public or private sector.

The fact that the world is a dangerous place, however, makes a strong intelligence capability absolutely vital to the United States. Im-

portant policy decisions depend upon accurate information about the capabilities and intentions of other nations. Any nation which proceeded without such information would run far graver risks than need be the case. The American government would not adequately represent the interests of the American people if it did not make strong efforts to collect and to analyze such information.

It will be said that no one is disparaging intelligence as such, but only the wisdom of allowing former intelligence people to hold certain sensitive government posts. It is said, for example, that America's opponents will misuse Mr. Pauken's background for their own purposes. The fact is that our opponents will misuse whatever they please, as they have demonstrated again and again.

It would be a grave error for the United States to base its policies upon the misrepresentations of others. Should we prohibit American firms from investing abroad because others claim that they are agents of American imperialism? Should we cease to support Israel because others say that Israel is guilty of Zionist racism? Should we suppose that every nation that calls itself a "democratic people's republic" is democratic, republican, and popular?

We cannot and should not establish our policies upon the basis of the misrepresentation of those who wish the United States ill. To do so displays a dangerous conceptual confusion and a lack of national self-confidence unworthy of our great ideals and traditions.

Credit Deserved

We must ask ourselves: Is a strong intelligence capability necessary to the preservation and expansion of freedom? And if, as is surely the case, the answer is affirmative, we ought to give due credit to those who perform this work with competence and often great risk. It simply will not do to cast aspersions and heap innuendos upon Americans who are performing a vital service to the nation. To do so is both destructive and unwise.

My own view is simple to state. I do not believe that an intelligence background (or, for that matter, a military background) ought to disqualify anyone from any post in the government at any time. Those who do not think that men with intelligence backgrounds ought to serve in ACTION or the Peace Corps would do well to remember that the American people chose last November a former CIA head as their vice president and that he is currently serving with great distinction. Those who think that men with military backgrounds ought not to serve in the Arms Control Agency or as secretary of state would do well to remember the many American presidents, beginning with Gen. Washington, who have served this country with great distinction.

Some of the opposition to people like Tom Pauken is thinly veiled hostility to those who serve in intelligence and military functions. The sooner the country moves beyond the aberration of this hostility and restores professions vital to our national security to a place of honor, the better.

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